

## Corner: UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative

### Significant leap forward for the Life Cycle Initiative at UN Sustainable Consumption and Production Expert Meeting in Marrakech and at SETAC Hamburg

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#### **UN Sustainable Consumption and Production Expert Meeting in Marrakech, Morocco, 16–19 June 2003**

The International Expert Meeting on a 10-Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production convened from 16–19 June 2003, in Marrakech, Morocco, recommended the world-wide implementation and sharing of experiences on Integrated Product Policy (IPP) approaches through international initiatives such as the Life Cycle Initiative. Moreover, the chair's summary recommended:

- UNEP to explore partnership with GEN (Global Eco-labelling network) to build knowledge pool and disseminate results in the field of eco-labelling;
- UN DESA and UNEP to start discussions with UNESCO about education on issues related to Sustainable Consumption and Production, and
- UN DESA and UN Habitat, in co-operation with UNEP and other stakeholders, to report on actions needed at the international level on waste, transportation, construction, water and sanitation.

In these areas there are opportunities for the Life Cycle Initiative to support UNEP's collaborations on Sustainable Consumption and Production. Another key input from the life cycle community to the 10-Year Framework of Programmes would consist in providing further scientific work on developing a function-based (integrated) approach to Sustainable Consumption and Production.

The Marrakech meeting was organised by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), in co-operation with UNEP. The aim of the meeting was to work towards the development of a 10-Year Framework in support of regional and national initiatives to promote sustainable consumption and production. The need for such a framework was called for in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation negotiated during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The recommendation to implement and share experiences on IPP followed the European Commission's adoption of the Communication on 'Integrated Product Policy – Building on Environmental Life-Cycle Thinking', which outlines a European strategy on IPP. It includes the promotion of the IPP approach and so the application of life cycle thinking on the international level. The Life Cycle Initiative is directly mentioned in the communication with regard to the need to make life cycle data more accessible. "The Commission will launch a co-ordination initiative involving both ongoing data collection efforts in the EU and existing harmonisation initiatives. This initiative will act as a European link to the ongoing United Nations Environmental Programme Life-Cycle Initiative." The IPP Communication states further that "LCAs provide the best framework for assessing the potential environmental impacts of products currently available. [...] Through a series of studies and workshops, the Commission will further this discussion [on best practice], with the aim of producing a handbook within two years on best practice, based on the best possible consensus attainable among stakeholders." According to its definition studies, the Life Cycle Initiative will provide not only input to the LCA part of IPP, but also to other IPP aspects such as Environmental Management Systems, Product Design and Eco-labelling through its Life Cycle Management Programme. It will serve of course as a forum for dialogue among stakeholders from different regions.

#### **Life Cycle Initiative events at the SETAC-Europe Annual meeting in Hamburg, Germany, 27 April – 1 May 2003**

One year after the launch of the UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative, activity levels have reached an all time high. The initiative was present with several events at the SETAC conference in Hamburg:

##### **1 Opening session, 27 April 2003**

UNEP's Assistant Executive Director<sup>1</sup> and chair of the International Life Cycle Panel, Jacqueline Aloisi de Larderel, gave a keynote speech. She said, "the Life Cycle Initiative is starting to serve as a global catalyst for life cycle knowledge transfer, fostering the use of life-cycle thinking in government, industry, and consumer decision-making world-wide."

##### **2 Meeting of the International Life Cycle Panel, 28 April 2003**

The record number of 26 participants attended the International Life Cycle Panel (ILCP). For the first time, the ILCP members from Brazil, India and Australia were able to join by phone, and representatives of potential new partners, i.e. the government of Canada, FZK/government of Germany, and the world-wide plastics industry participated. The following decisions were made:

- Recommendations were given for changes in the definition studies; they should be finalised during this summer and be published as PDF documents on the initiative's website. We will ask for comments ([guido.sonnemann@unep.fr](mailto:guido.sonnemann@unep.fr)), which may lead to last revisions after summer when the debate on particular open topics reaches a more mature status.
- The web-based user needs assessment should go on. Please visit our website <http://www.unepie.org/pc/sustain/lcinitiative/> to participate in an updated LCM survey.
- A roadmap for 2003 was established that reinforces the deliverables decided upon at the last ILCP meeting [see Int J LCA 8 (2) 61 (2003)].
- Taskforces will be set up for each programme in 2003, in order to deliver products. Members of Taskforces are selected on a worldwide and multi-stakeholder basis, taking into account the specific

expertise and the availability to provide input. This selection process will be based on the Expressions of Interest received by the secretariat, i.e. the Working Groups will serve as a pool for volunteers for the Taskforces.

- Procedural documents for the Life Cycle Initiative, including those on the functioning of the task forces and the review process, will be prepared for the next ILCP meeting that should take place in early December, probably in Lausanne.

##### **3 Kick-off meeting for Working Groups, 29 April 2003**

Around 100 experts attended the Kick-off meeting for Working Groups. The initiative's programme managers informed the interested experts about the current state of the three definition studies. Open questions were discussed. The experts expressed interest in further supporting the initiative's work. It is expected that many will participate in a series of Taskforces over the upcoming year.

##### **4 Life Cycle Impact Assessment Workshop, 30 April – 1 May 2003**

US EPA and the Life Cycle Initiative organised together the Workshop "Taxonomy of Impact Categories and the Life Cycle Impact Assessment (LCIA) Framework – Criteria to systematically proceed." The workshop, on which a forthcoming issue of Int J LCA will report in more detail, had some really interesting outcomes:

- To enlarge the scope of the quantitative life cycle indicators by including, next to environmental indicators, also safety, work conditions, costs, and possibly labour;
- To open the LCIA framework for a developing country perspective since current indicators are not always progress-orientated with regard to human development;
- To consider whether a task force should be set up for this topic.

##### **UNEP/ SETAC Partners**

UNEP/SETAC partners in the Life Cycle Initiative are AIST (National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology), Japan, Alliance for Beverage Cartons and the Environment (ACE), International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), General Motors, Government of the Netherlands, Government of Switzerland and the CIRAG/ Government of Quebec.

<sup>1</sup> Retired on 30 April 2003 after 15 years as director of UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (<http://www.greenjal.net/>)